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"THE WILL TO BELIEVE" AND THE DUTY TO DOUBT.

OF all the devices for the relief of scepticism in which speculative subtlety has abounded, the simplest is the attempt to establish desire by arguments of philosophy as final master of the situation; to prove that each of us may lawfully take counsel of his "nature," and freely elect what he shall believe. The doctrine that faith is a duty and doubt a sin, that both by consequence are directly in charge of the will, is, of course, of ancient origin; but in most Christian exhortations the pleas addressed to will are found side by side with pleas addressed to reason, and the two pleadings are not fully distinguished. The appeal to "deliberate and courageous volition," standing consciously by itself, seems for the most part to have come in almost within the century, in the train of that intellectual assertion of self and spirit of speculative adventure which belong to the Revolution and the romantic movement. Within the century the appeal has been frequent and often vehement. It had not, of course, been literally uttered by Kant, but with his theory of God and immortality as "postulates," involved in acceptance of the moral law, Kant opened the way. Fichte followed more boldly and preached a theory similar but more comprehensive, with a new and fervent accent. All conviction is "faith, that voluntary acquiescence" in a view, "because only through this view can we fulfil our vocation." "It proceeds from the character, not from the understanding." It is "a resolution of the will." "I do not accept because I must; I believe . . . because I will." "All our thought is founded on our impulses,—as a man's affections are so in his knowledge." "I shall open my eyes; shall learn thoroughly to know myself. . . . I shall thus form my own mode of thought. . . . I might have followed blindly the teachings of my spiritual nature. But I would not be a work of nature, but of myself, and I have become so even by means of this resolution."

Since Fichte,* this thought of the supremacy of will has deeply colored much of the philosophy of the century. It has even affected the theory of inductive science, for influential treatises on logic, including some of the most influential—those of Lotze, Jevons, and Professor Sigwart, for instance, as well as Professor Bain's,—base the whole procedure of empirical science on the “postulate” or assumption, voluntary and unproven, of the regularity of nature; and the like is heard from men of science such as Helmholtz and those so little influenced by German romanticism as Huxley and Clifford. There have been metaphysical systems in plenty, more or less sceptical in premise, but positive in aim, which have by natural consequence handed over the ultimate decision to will. That this tendency is still powerful in Germany, Professor Paulsen, among others, has attested by his lucid and in some respects beautiful “*Einleitung in die Philosophie*,” published some six years ago. How powerful the tendency is at present in the English-speaking world appears (to select brilliant instances from a multitude) in Mr. Arthur Balfour’s “*Defence of Philosophic Doubt*,” and “*Foundations of Belief*,” and most forcibly of all in Professor William James’s volume called “*The Will to Believe, and other Essays*.” †

In none of all these has the principle of the free “postulate” stood forth in such bold relief or found advocacy from so congenial a temperament as in the last instance. In most of them there are occasional traces of the pre-romantic tendency to throw some thin protection of reason over the firm stand of the will, or to give proof that they build upon something better than pure desire. It would be hard to find another among the many “postulators” of the century who has so completely the courage of his assumptions. Fichte sought carefully to distinguish his position from “*ein freier Entschluss das für wahr zu halten was das Herz wünscht*.” Newman urges in “*Tract 85*”: “Let us forestall knowledge by faith. Let us

* Fichte, “*Werke*,” ii., 253 *et seq.* I have used Dr. Smith’s translation.

† A brief notice of this book appeared in this JOURNAL in January, 1898. I shall here concern myself only with those of the essays it contains which bear on the subject of voluntary belief.

maintain before we have demonstrated." But in the "Grammar of Assent" it appears that our faculty for extracting certainty from partial evidence, the faculty of religious faith, acts somehow with the authority of reason. Mr. Balfour, after summing up the conclusion of his "Defence" in the proposition that logic has no objection to offer to "an ultimate impulse to believe a creed," tries in his later work by an ingenious argument to bring in this "ultimate impulse" out of its isolated exposure into at least the sheltered neighborhood of reason. It is a refreshing move towards clearness when Mr. James, instead of still further torturing metaphysic and extorting some new approximation to proof for a religious optimism, takes his stand on sheer volition. He vigorously "preaches the liberty of believing," "the lawfulness of voluntarily adopted faith," "the right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced." "I wish to make you feel," he says,—I take a form of his favorite declaration pitched upon almost at random,—"that we have a right to believe the physical order to be only a partial order; that we have a right to supplement it by an unseen spiritual order which we assume on trust, if only thereby life may seem worth living again." "The thesis I defend is, briefly stated, this: Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, 'Do not decide, but leave the question open,' is itself a passional decision, just like deciding yes or no, and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth." "Faith based on desire," "believing by volition,"—thus he characterizes a mood of mind which he goes on to defend with inexhaustible resources of ingenuity and illustration, and with that well-known diction, straight from the hot-springs of an intense imagination, with which already, in his "Psychology," he made alive whatever he touched.

There is something in Mr. James's stress upon the intellectual offices of will calculated to do essential service to

philosophy in the forlornness of its present state ; but only if clearly distinguished from the letter of his teaching. The literal precepts, as above, to which he lends his high authority are, I hold, among the formidable obstacles to progress in that disordered and distracted science. For my own part, I am of the old-fashioned conviction that such precepts are in effect an attempt to corrupt intelligence, that they aim a deadly blow at the vital instincts of the upright intellect. This is not the aspect of the matter that I should myself choose to put first. There is that to my own perception in honeyed theories of our place or prospects as men, in postulates of a golden solution of things fetched from whatever heaven of invention which are accredited because so eminently to our taste,—there is that in the sight of the constructive postulator, fancy-free, busy at his landscape-gardening in the infinite,—which is not so noticeably immoral as ridiculous. Desire strikes me as a quaint fortune-teller for man or the world. The defects in the appointments of this universe as a home for sensitive beings are only too obvious ; but to rely for remedy upon the familiar human propensity to disbelieve in the existence of that which would be exceedingly disagreeable, seems a device past articulate comment. At such a medicine for its maladies, “the soul, if the soul had fingers, would snap them.” But this JOURNAL is devoted primarily to ethical concerns ; and Mr. James has himself raised the question of intellectual duty by scoffing long and heartily at the fantastic scruples of scientific purists and pedants who condemn the “faith” he defends as immoral. The charge is old. Moral distinctions are said to soften with age, and it even seems a return to the pragmatism of a bygone controversial spirit and little in accord with the easy temper of speculative discussion at this hour to call a theory “immoral.” That, in the feelings of large contemporary minds, is an epithet that should attach to disputed opinions only as a quotation from the Philistines and provincials. But thought is an agency ; as Mr. James truly sets forth it may be guided, thwarted, or seduced by the will ; it has goods to gain and evils to escape ; and hence has its right and wrong. So far as intellectual emancipation permits us to retain intellectual

conscience we still have the organ to discern that belief forcibly seized on is not honestly come by. The Will to Believe is a thing to be absolutely separated from the will to know the truth. The former is a desire for a purely subjective result, a state of our own consciousness that we seek in the first instance for its own sake, and may be willing to take an efficacious intellectual drug to produce. The latter is a desire that our convictions may correspond with reality, and naturally leads us to seek simply, with inflexible directness, for the fact. Nor must we confound the will to believe with the wish, in itself blameless, natural, and even laudable, to find the truth congenial. As the author justly observes, "the most useful investigator, because the most sensitive observer, is always he whose eager interest in one side of the question is balanced by an equally keen nervousness lest he be deceived." The wish to find the truth congenial must first of all in consistency be a wish to find the truth. The Will to Believe is the will to deceive—to deceive one's self; and the deception, which begins at home, may be expected in due course to pass on to others. It is the will to hold that thing certain which now we feel to be uncertain; it says, "This thing seems to my best intelligence doubtful; but I will subject my mind to such a course of treatment; I will so tempt and beguile it by presenting this one matter for its credence and withholding rivals; I will so hypnotize it by keeping its gaze on this one brilliant object; that I shall presently find myself reposing in the peaceable possession of a full belief."

No one can retort that the mind does not arrive at conviction in this way. The process is all too easy, the issue with many tempers all too assured. We shall perhaps have space to consider briefly the relations of will and belief and note certain differences with Mr. James as to the precise means by which the first can bring about the second. Meanwhile the objection to this systematic cozening of the intellect is assuredly not that it fails of its end.

In speaking with all unreserve of this philosophy of intellectual despair, it is as natural as needless to say at starting with what earnest, respectful heed I receive (as one who would

distinguish great from small in the things of speculation) whatever its author may choose to say. It would be idle to dilate on the mastership of this strong and humble thinker and perceiver, or on the place of authority (in the only sense in which authority in science has a meaning) which he holds against his will. But there are aspects of his peculiar power which concern this discussion. Philosophy and the neighboring science of psychology have for the most part been singularly sapless branches of the tree of knowledge. Their voluminous annals seem in some moods not unlike the pyramid of eighty thousand skulls that Timour erected in the valley of Bagdad. Even the wit that one may come upon in their disquisitions suggests a little the marrowless grin of a skeleton. In psychology the laws and elements of the mind have been described to us in chill mechanical terms from which the vital heat of conscious life has long escaped. It is fortunate that the psychological movement of the second half of the century (not without kinship with the romantic and historical interests, nor again with naturalism in fiction), which has brought forth things strange and new—which has spared attention from the broad unvaried elementary laws for the differences, the idiosyncrasies, the moods and maladies of consciousness—should have found a thinker so fitted to give life and warmth to its work. Here is indeed a mind created for psychology in its later development; a mind animated by an instinctive self-forgetful interest in all consciousness, but chiefly in all that pertains to feeling and will, the active essence of the psychic being; fascinated by personality and temperament, by whatsoever is differential, unique, and irreducible, by the emotional depths and secret recesses, the shadows and twilight of the mind; all this interest being sympathetic and affectionate, a standing refutation of the fancied antagonism between love and knowledge. Here is the very romanticist in psychology, keen to trace the scarlet thread in the tissue of things, his back turned upon the theories that seem to make of mind a mere passive flow and association of lifeless ideas—the pallid theories of the eighteenth century. Here is the predestined interpreter of the rich variety, the “warmth and intimacy” of conscious-

ness, whose instinct it is to seize on words of depth, volume, and vital strength that sometimes fairly grip the heart. An intelligence so humane, an imagination so vital and various, have a strange power over the reader. As one follows his pages one gradually becomes aware of the large benignant eye that looks out from them,—an eye in which intellectual travail and spiritual experience have not dimmed the native fire. In the hands of this author psychology becomes in no mocking or unmeaning sense the science of the soul.

It is not wholly surprising, therefore, that a mind of this cast, when it turns to universal problems, should give us the philosophy of a psychologist. His teaching is not an objective cosmical construction; it is a medicine for souls. I may illustrate my meaning in part by a very different example. It has often been debated regarding Hume whether he was essentially a sceptic or no. The answer is that he was not essentially a sceptic, because he was not essentially a philosopher; he was a psychologist. He was an analytical man of science, the whole world of whose interest was human nature. He conceived himself to have discovered laws and other principles that held true throughout that world, and with this discovery he was satisfied. Any facts of mind that were inseparably bound up with facts not of mind,—the psychology of the senses, for instance, which is bound up with physiology,—he instinctively rejected (like others of his time), for its entangling connections. The sureness of his instinct is shown by the fact that the study of the senses has brought into psychology an influx of a new order of thinkers from the physiological quarter, who seek to find in the mind at large mere instances of laws that apply to the whole universe that contains it. Hume took the mind as his sufficient whole, and if the laws and distinctions he found to prevail there seemed to involve confusion and stoppage to the reasonings of philosophy about the world in general, he states that result placidly, and turns back undepressed to his favorite ground. He states the result in a purely subjective and psychological way, telling us how his moods of belief and of unbelief in the world succeed each other. Had his interests been in any

primary degree cosmical, and had his principles been in no point revised, he must have become a serious philosophical sceptic.

Mr. James has a far more eager cosmical interest (of an indirect sort) than Hume, and his psychological interest is of a far different character; he loves, not to undo the joinery of consciousness, to resolve things mental into sharply distinct constituent particles, but to watch the will at work, the deep passion thrusting the lighter passion aside; he is in his first concern no analyst or atomist, but a humanist, an absorbed spectator of consciousness in its personal and dramatic meaning, fellow-being and physician to the life he observes. But, like Hume still, despite all this unlikeness, his cosmical interest is subordinate to his psychological and seldom wholly dissociated from it. The world to him,—it is the human spirit musing on its world. Malebranche taught, in the well-known phrase, that we “see all things in God;” Mr. James, for the most part, sees all things—God and the world—in the temperament of man. The outer self-subsistent nature of things (“realistic” or “idealistic”), save as a depressing or sustaining vision to the individual conceiver, is (till he forces his thought full upon it) a cold and almost negligible “thing-in-itself.” In the adjustments of theory the interests of the spirit are for him self-evidently first. If he does not interpret this in a hedonist fashion and say with Pater, for instance, that theories exist to minister to our pleasure and prepare us for greater pleasures, it is because his sympathies go with another wing of romanticism, and prize not so much what is received as what presses from within and issues into act, the stir, stress, and leap of impulse;—the precise sense and scope of the word pleasure suffering a trifle, perhaps, in a repugnance to all that is associated with systems that make the mind essentially a passive recipient of experience. All the qualities he values in the spirit must be fed and fostered in its philosophy,—its care for rich fulness, for instance, and its strength. The author’s own love of richness is tempered only by a still greater love of strength. The recent movements of philosophy, he tells us, “are but tacklings to the common port, to that ultimate *Weltanschauung* of

maximum subjective and objective richness, which, whatever its other properties may be, will at any rate wear the theistic form." Hence his protest against what he deems a narrow and niggard asceticism in matters of belief that would have us mortify the imagination and starve the spirit in the pursuit of a visionary rational sanctity. For the purposes of scientific calculation he does not deny the validity of the atomic theory; but when in the name of science it asks the central place in an ultimate *Weltanschauung* for a world of atoms stripped by science of its coat of many colors, and standing there to the mind's eye in all its shivering nakedness,—nay, the unsightly skeleton of a world,—he will have none of the repulsive thing. From such a pallid conception of the background of human life he incites us to take refuge in scarlet sins (as timorous logicians fancy them) of imaginative faith. So, too, as to such analytic theories of mind as seem to take from it finally its unity, its freedom, its power upon matter. The refusal to see the world dismantled and the soul dismembered by scientific analysis is absolute; for the rules of reason itself are based on nothing deeper or firmer than the demand that in these things we shall not be permanently despoiled and impoverished. "From the soul there is no appeal,"—the words might have been his own. Philosophy, as it is necessarily the expression of temperament, so by its essential office ministers to the intellectual and spiritual life; and any form of it which presents the universe as a low-lived thing, or in its ultimate derivation of conscience drags the noblest part of us through the mud, is thereby self-condemned.

As for the quality of strength, nowhere does the heroic moral note of a strenuous romanticism burst more nobly and stirringly forth than in these philosophic expositions:

"The deepest difference, practically, in the moral life of man is the difference between the easy-going and the strenuous mood. . . . The capacity for the strenuous mood probably lies slumbering in every man, but it has more difficulty in some than in others in waking up. It needs the wilder passions to arouse it, the big fears, loves, and indignations; or else the deeply penetrating appeal of some one of the higher fidelities, like justice, truth, or freedom. Strong relief is a necessity of its vision; and a world where all the mountains are brought down and all the valleys are exalted is no congenial place for its habitation.

. . . This is why, in a merely human world without a God, the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power. Life, to be sure, is even in such a world a genuinely ethical symphony; but it is played in the compass of a couple of poor octaves, and the infinite scale of values fails to open up. Many of us, indeed, like Sir James Stephen, in those eloquent 'Essays by a Barrister,' would openly laugh at the very idea of the strenuous mood being awakened in us by those claims of remote posterity which constitute the last appeal of the religion of humanity. We do not love these men of the future keenly enough; and we love them perhaps the less the more we hear of their evolutionized perfection, their high average longevity, and education, their freedom from war and crime, their relative immunity from pain and zymotic disease, and all their other negative superiorities. This is all too finite, we say; we see too well the vacuum beyond. It lacks the note of infinitude and mystery, and may all be dealt with in the don't-care mood. No need of agonizing ourselves or making others agonize for these good creatures just at present.

"When, however, we believe that a God is there and that He is one of the claimants, the infinite perspective opens out. The scale of the symphony is incalculably prolonged. The more imperative ideals now begin to speak with an altogether new objectivity and significance, and to utter the penetrating, shattering, tragically shattering note of appeal. They ring out like the call of Victor Hugo's Alpine eagle, '*qui parle au précipice et que le gouffre entend*,' and the strenuous mood awakens at the sound. It saith among the trumpets, Ha! ha! it smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting. Its blood is up; and cruelty to the lesser claims, so far from being a deterrent element, does but add to the stern joy with which it leaps to answer to the greater. . . .

"The capacity of the strenuous mood lies so deep down among our natural human possibilities that even were there no metaphysical or traditional grounds for believing in a God, men would postulate one simply as a pretext for living hard, and getting out of the game of existence its keenest possibilities of zest. Our attitude towards concrete evils is entirely different in a world where there are none but finite demanders, from what it is in one where we joyously face tragedy for an infinite demander's sake. Every sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity for handling life's evils, is set free in those who have religious faith."

What, however, are the specific articles in whose interest this defence of faith is maintained? What is it more precisely that Mr. James would postulate in religion? The essentials only he gives us to understand in his first essay; and they seem at first sufficiently vague. "Religion says essentially two things:

"First, she says that the best things [and Mr. James means morally best] are the more eternal things, the overlapping things, the things in the universe that throw the last stone, so

to speak, and say the final word. 'Perfection is eternal'—this phrase of Charles Secrétan seems a good way of putting this first affirmation of religion, an affirmation which obviously cannot yet be verified scientifically at all.

"The second affirmation of religion is that we are better off even now if we believe her first affirmation to be true."

In another essay: "Religion has meant many things in human history; but when from now onward I use the term I mean to use it in the supernaturalist sense, as declaring that the so-called order of nature, which constitutes this world's experience, is only one portion of the total universe, and that there stretches beyond this visible world an unseen world of which we now know nothing positive, but in its relation to which the true significance of our present mundane life consists. A man's religious faith (whatever more special items of doctrine it may involve) means for me essentially his faith in the existence of an unseen order of some kind in which the riddles of the natural order may be found explained. In the more developed religions the natural world has always been regarded as the mere scaffolding or vestibule of a truer, more eternal world, and affirmed to be a sphere of education, trial, or redemption?" This is not closely defined; and "it is a fact of human nature that men can live and die by the help of a sort of faith that goes without a single dogma or definition." Elsewhere, however, these nebulous postulates become not a little more specific. We are frequently told that they amount to a belief in God, and in one passage that the essential features of that belief are first, "that God be conceived as the deepest power in the universe; and, second, He must be conceived under the form of a mental personality. The personality need not be determined intrinsically any further than is involved in the holding of certain things dear, and in the recognition of our dispositions towards those things, the things themselves being all good and righteous things." . . . "A power not ourselves, then, which not only makes for righteousness, but means it, and which recognizes us, such is the definition which I think nobody will be inclined to dispute. . . . In whatever other respects the divine personality may differ

from ours or may resemble it, the two are consanguineous at least in this,—that both have purposes for which they care, and each can hear the other's call."

One marks a broad gain when Mr. James thus emerges from the sunlit mist of a vague optimism to assert in terms a personal God. In these times of mental confusion, when *dissecta membra* of old religions float by us and the clouds of Hegelheim have streamed loose and blacken the sky above our heads, it is a relief to hear of a philosophic divinity that is rather somebody than something. It was one of the singular failures of perception in a singularly perceptive mind that Matthew Arnold should have dismissed the pronouncement of the personality of God as a bit of Aryan metaphysics standing where it ought not, amidst the really precious moral truths of Christianity. A morality touched with the kind of emotion called spirituality should have seen that upon the conceived presence of a person hangs communion, and the ideal of the social passions. No other form of theism can hope to concentrate the optimistic, the moral, the contemplative, and the affectionate elements of religion. It is, indeed, despite its difficulties, so sovereign a thought that one cannot better express the futility of the postulating humor than by saying that the whole nature's craving to know it true may be quite disjoined from any temptation to drug one's doubts, creep into the belief on any terms, and have done. Even the mere mechanicians of logic and artisans of analysis (for whose ways of mind Mr. James does not dissemble his contempt), too thoroughly subdued to what they work in to share the deeper spiritual appetites of men, may feel at times its seizing and sustaining power; even if they lack the high spirit in dealing with ultimate problems to tell themselves thereupon loudly that it is true. It is interesting, however, to see how little *stress* is laid by a mind so preoccupied with personality as the author's upon the consciousness of God or our communion with it. God is rather an imposing, cloud-mantled figure and a mighty voice than a thinking and feeling life. An absorption in the intricacies of the near warm, struggling, imperfect consciousness that we know, can exist without any

keen interest in a consciousness that by its omnipotence and its superlative excellences may seem in contrast "defecated to a pure transparency."

And this sheds some light upon the author's attitude towards the conception of immortality. Here seems an obvious and tempting occasion for the postulate; but Mr. James does not embrace it. Nothing in "naturalism" has seemed to do deeper damage, or has given more cause for the repinings of the spiritual imagination than its refusal to sanction this belief; and the craving for this belief has been a head-spring of voluntary faith. Theism is commonly sought in great part as a guarantee for immortality. The loss of this guarantee is, perhaps, for most natures (hardly for the finest) the first sting of all theories that make man stand friendless in the universe. The haziest optimism that affirms nature's goodwill towards us, and "the ultimate amiability of all things" is really ascribing to the cosmic powers that be such a care for humankind as will, against all chances, preserve it. The mind draws back at a representation of the universe as a vast wilderness of atoms with sporadic forms of consciousness clinging to them, not only, or perhaps mainly, because of its ugliness or the parasitical part assigned to man, but because the thought is carried forward to the moment when consciousness will be extinct, and the material remains of the world—its lifeless corpse—exist alone. It is idle to maintain that this imaginative clutch of life for the man and the race is transitory or ignoble. Mr. Frederic Harrison may tell us as vehemently as he will that "a perpetuity of sensation" would be a veritable hell (assuming gratuitously that the liability to fatigue must remain the same); to him who has life is commonly given the appetite for it in proportion, and to him who has an affection the proportionate will that it shall continue. Moralists resigned to "naturalism" have been so fertile in devices (tonic and noble beyond praise in themselves) for making edifying use of the memory of friends we have lost that they are almost ready to say that no value has been forfeited; to deny the primary essence of love,—the desire to know the existence, presence, and well-being of its objects.

Here, strangely enough at first sight, Mr. James is not with us. "I have to confess," he tells us in his recently published Ingersoll Lecture, "that my own personal feeling about immortality has never been of the keenest order, and that among the problems that give my mind solicitude this one does not take the very foremost place;" and in the argument with which, in the Lecture, he rebuts a philosophic objection to a future life, he makes it anything but plain that on his own conception personality would remain. Perhaps in this as in the case of divine personality (if conjecture may be acquitted of impertinence in a student who would come at his author's intent) what carries the consciousness beyond discernible struggle and passion and the play of "wavering lights and shadows,"—beyond the "Rembrandtesque chiaro-oscuro" that fascinates this psychologist,"—carries it away from the vivid centre of his interest. A clever critic has said of Browning that "the method by which the fool arrives at his folly is as dear to him as the ultimate wisdom of the wise." Mr. James, too, has certainly a close and kindly interest in imperfection.* His want of solicitude about the spirits of just men made perfect and of the desire for

"Something afar
From the scene of our sorrow,"

seems akin to his little love for the "evolutionized perfection," "high average longevity," and the like, of the men of the future. At all events, this indifference lends a certain disinterestedness to his defence of faith. It is not a universe more considerate of our interests or more sedulous of our survival that he postulates. It is not spiritual creature-comforts that he would have us secure by the will to believe.

The interpretation of the author's thesis that I gave at the outset seems no more than is implied in the title he has chosen for his book and such other expressions as were cited. But there press upon me as I write the ready replies, the

* The postulate that "perfection is eternal," quoted above, seems to mean that the moral elements in the strife of the world will persist and somehow conquer.

plentiful facts and reasonings, with which he would meet, and mostly has met in advance, the comment I there made. To a book so full of argumentative resources, full justice cannot in this brief space be done at all. No approach to justice is possible without some deliberate analysis; and it is little else than a partial analysis that I am attempting here. It must be said at once that the interpreter encounters difficulties; indeed, it is impossible to collect from the many scattered passages in point a wholly consistent meaning. The volume is a medley of essays written at various intervals and promptings, and by no builder of a system nor contented dweller in any. The author avows a belief that there are "real possibilities," "real indeterminations," and "real conflicts" in the world, and that whatever it has of value depends upon their reality. Well, just so there are real indeterminations and real conflicts contained within his own thought and text, and the richness and pregnancy of these rest partly upon that fact. But it is the result of this inclusion of contending forces, of the "pluralistic world" of his own reflection and temper, that an author is in some sort chargeable with the flaws of both alternatives that his thought embraces.

Having thus some view of the articles in which we are to put faith, the question arises whether the author means that we are to bring ourselves by use of will into a believing state of mind, an internal assent, or only that we are to act as if we believed. A critic in the *Nation* newspaper apparently judges that it is the latter. In truth, much vigorous writing could be cited to either effect. We hear of our "right to believe" and also of our "right to adopt a believing attitude;" of "the right of the individual to indulge his personal faith at his personal risk," and again, of merely "acting on the assumption" of a certain tenet.

The author speaks of "those questions that belong to the province of personal faith to decide." If faith "decides," as in the case here referred to, a question of truth or falsehood, faith would appear to be the mental state of belief. Indeed, it is roundly said, "Faith means belief in something concerning which doubt is still theoretically possible; and," the writer goes

directly on, "as the test of belief is willingness to act, one may say that faith is the readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance." Thus (though one does not gather why the thing should be identified with its test) it would seem that it is no mere outward scheme of living, without an *ex animo* assent, that is recommended, but action flowing from and expressing a state of mind which is none the less belief because it rises superior to the evidence. However, there is much about risk boldly faced. "I have discussed the kinds of risk; . . . and I have pleaded that it is better to face them openly than to act as if we did not know them to be there." Faith "is in fact the same moral quality which we call courage in practical affairs." But the risk in question is the risk of being wrong, and to face that risk is to face uncertainty, to entertain doubt. And, as if to put us finally to confusion, comes the remark, to illustrate the courage of faith, that "there will be a very wide-spread tendency in men of vigorous nature to enjoy a certain amount of uncertainty in their philosophic creed, just as risk lends a zest to worldly activity."

The possible attitudes in this regard are not hard to classify. To believe a proposition is to hold it true. To believe it incompletely is to hold it more or less probably true, but possibly false. To recognize it as possibly false is so far to withhold belief from it. Belief is the appearance to the mind of truth in a proposition, reality in a thing. Belief and admission of falsity are, whether absolutely or in degrees, mutually exclusive. Now we may (as I said seemed the inevitable implication of terms the author puts in the foreground) deliberately make "good resolutions" of belief; we may resolve to kill a doubt we have and breed a belief we as yet have not; observation informs us that this can be done. In this case at the outset we face risk, the risk that our belief presently to be acquired may be false, that our doubts now being smothered may be justified. When, however, our course of self-treatment has been successful, and the belief is duly installed, the doubt by the force of the terms has vanished, and the uncertainty, though from the former point of view it was there and from some other mind's point of view may still be there, can by the

mind in question be "faced" no longer. At this stage it is inapposite to quote, "the virtue to exist by faith as sailors live by courage; as, by strength of heart, the sailor fights with roaring seas," for in the exact measure in which faith is present, courage is not needed. At an earlier stage there may have been intellectual courage, though the species of courage involved in purchasing either mental comfort or mental exaltation, by shutting our eyes to sources of uncertainty, is much that of the ostrich that buries its head in the sand. A person who vigorously asserts a thing to himself because he wishes it to be true, is not commonly called a brave man for his pains. But note in any case that what is supposed to be courageous is not faith (if as Mr. James defined it "faith means belief"), but the will to acquire faith, the will to believe; and so far as that will accomplishes itself, the occasion for courage has passed.

The other alternative is the resolution not to believe, but to act as if certain propositions were true, from social motives, or ultimate personal preference, though we freely and mentally admit the while that they are entirely doubtful. There is no peculiarly intellectual courage here, because there is no intellectual interference of the will, but its practical application only. Under either alternative there may or may not, of course, be courageous practical conduct, but that is foreign to the question. Under this second alternative, however, it has to be noted, we may have a subtle approach to the first; for in controlling our conduct we may tend to control our imaginations, and so fix that habit of thought which constitutes belief.

The present case exhibits, I believe, both of these situations intermingled and not, I think, distinguished. In his preface Mr. James calls his attitude "empiricism." "I say 'empiricism,' because it is contented to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of experience." There speaks to us the philosopher in wide contemplation of philosophic systems. Later, to the same effect, in the body of the book, "Faith is synonymous with working hypothesis. . . . A chemist, etc.

. . . Now, in such questions as God, immortality, absolute morality, and free-will, no professed believer at the present day pretends his faith to be of a radically different complexion; he can always doubt his creed." Thus we should will to believe in default of evidence, but we are never to allow that will wholly to take effect. It is, perhaps, only the Will to Hope. Or is it that the multitude are humanely counselled to drown their doubts while the philosopher himself keeps his vision clear? Is this (unconsciously to the author) a gospel for spiritual weaklings delivered by a strong man who cannot find it in him to take advantage of it himself? Or are we all expected to have in us something of the multitude and a little of the philosopher; to know ourselves needy of faith and resolve recurringly to embrace it; to turn again and again with an access of resolve a set face of conviction to our world; to remember with return of self-consciousness that this is but our own attitude, taken at a risk of error; to act thus both the teacher of "wholesome doctrine" and the taught, deceiver and deceived, by turns or at once, and so appropriately illustrate our time?

About Mr. James himself there can be little question. For himself he is not one of those who, as Hume somewhere says, cover their eyes with their wings, their perceptions with their aspirations, like the angels in the Book of Revelation. Not wholly believing, or ever rejecting, he lives after all on the perilous edge, breathing the "eager air" of hazard to the last. And the temper that spurns agnosticism with its logical qualms and scruples and its spiritual penury, that gains "richness of result" by "indulging its personal faith," but all the while "enjoys a certain amount of uncertainty," is a fit birth of the *Zeitgeist* in an age of mental indecision. Mr. James's words had sometimes led us to picture him as one of a full habit of belief despising the water-gruel regimen of suspense and negation to which a pedantic rigorism would restrict us. But, no; he does not believe, albeit with the best will to believe (at times), in the world. He has the courage of his assumptions, but not their serenity. He has only a fighting faith (so to use the term for the moment), but no resting or reaping faith.

We must place him among "*die Philosophen des gefährlichen vielleicht.*" No student of Carlyle can fail to remark much affinity to him in Mr. James's spirit and ideals. Of Carlyle, Friedrich Nietzsche has written: "*Ein Mann . . . den beständig das verlangen nach einem starken Glauben agacirt und das Gefühl der Unfähigkeit dazu (darin ein typischer Romantiker!). Das verlangen nach einem starken Glauben ist nicht der Beweis eines starken Glaubens, vielmehr das Gegentheil.*" The late Sir James Stephen described Newman, in the midst of his subtle dealings with doubt in the "Grammar of Assent," as "a worm wriggling on a hook." But in our present author nothing evokes so potently as his suspense between belief and unbelief that something ardent, manful, and generous that escapes at all times from his pages. He has a frank and fearless exultation in his plight, a sense of sublimity as at the abyss's brink, an appeal to the pride of will and last "turnings of the character" which, profitless, perhaps, in their literal philosophic import, have in them something that rouses the blood like the peal and tucket of a bugle. His speculative attitude expresses his scorn of intellectual ease. Philosophy is for him a strenuous exercise and high adventure of the spirit,—at once a fortifying discipline and a test of our present quality.

If, now, I speak in this scanty space of the philosophic justification of the Will to Believe—or to Make-Believe—according to whatever interpretation, I must pass over most of Mr. James's points of argument and touch only on what is fundamental. My deepest philosophical difference with Mr. James may be put thus: It does not follow, because we cannot prove everything, because in the last resort we can prove nothing, that we are free to assume what we choose. He appears to conceive that with the surrender of what he terms Rationalism, Absolutism, etc., belief becomes a question of taste. This is the enviable liberty of what he pleasantly calls his Irrationalism. As soon as the lights of reason are turned down we may help ourselves in the dark to what we can lay hands on. Since there is no longer a rational warrant for belief, there is no longer a rational bar to assumption; one belief is just as

good in that regard as another; so that we may deal with them on the single basis of our predilections, unconfused by the introduction of any alien standard. The comfortable doctrine has not, of course, been confined to Mr. James. Mr. Balfour, in his "Defence of Philosophic Doubt," a book fascinating by its bold play of intellect and exquisite logical delicacy, the book of no temperamental romanticist, be it said by the way, but of a classicist if ever there was one, comes to the conclusion that we accept science, not from adequate reason, but from a "practical need," "a kind of inward inclination or impulse," and that hence we have no ground to resist a similar impulse, "rooted . . . in the loftiest region of our moral nature," to accept the Christian religion.

Now the denial of "rationalism" I would not contest. It is, I think, an important and seasonable service of Mr. James's and Mr. Balfour's books that they assail its foundations. The fabric of belief cannot be completely "rationalized." That is, there are legitimate beliefs which cannot be proved. This familiar statement, in some sense a commonplace of philosophy, is commonly evaded by putting ultimate beliefs under some form of protection by reason which is not identical with proof. But this is equally hopeless. Reason cannot communicate validity to all beliefs, because reason itself rests upon certain beliefs. The general principles of reason or presuppositions of reasoning are either so-called analytic or verbal propositions, not real mental propositions at all, or they are in their ultimate resolution propositions expressing indemonstrable beliefs, unproved assertions of our nature. Nor is this a profession of philosophic scepticism. I cannot accept this name put upon it by Mr. Balfour, any more than Mr. James's name of "irrationalism." To ask of reason what it cannot here perform, to regard its inability as a discomfiture, a failure to meet due expectation, is entirely to misconceive the office and pretension of a subordinate engine of the mind. It is the function of reason to bring our minor and dependent beliefs into harmony with those that are fundamental and independent, to subject superficial tendencies to

permanent instincts. Taken with its cerebral counterpart, it is, from the point of view of physiology, a form of inhibition; from the point of view of general biology, a means of checking first tendencies to reaction, and so preserving the organism alive in an environment full of traps. I cannot think it other than a misfortune that in a time when, despite or because of emancipations, both caprice and prejudice, in and out of philosophy, receive their liberal share of applause, the authority of reason should be deemed weakened because a confused theory calling itself "rationalism" falls to the ground. The effect could not be better illustrated than in Mr. James's impression that the way is now open to postulate an unseen world designed with a view to its stimulating effect on certain too torpid emotions.

The truth is that Mr. James and Mr. Balfour fail to discriminate beliefs found from beliefs made; those subsisting in the mind of themselves from those that we fetch, plant, and water there. It is not true that we accept the foundations of science because we have a "motive" to do so consisting of a certain "inward inclination or impulse." Motives are for choices, impulses are to actions, and we do not choose to believe the foundations of science, nor do we adopt them as true by act. We find them existing for our minds; an assured belief presents itself without our forth-putting. Nature to us, and its elementary properties, are simply real: that is what is meant by saying that we believe in them. Where we have to create a belief, we at first by hypothesis have it not. In that stage the thing is not real to us; but we so deal with our minds that it subsequently becomes so. Our authors write for persons who do not securely possess religious belief, but who would like to possess it. These, indeed, have an inward "inclination or impulse" to obtain satisfactions from which they are debarred. Our authors invite them to put forth the hand and take what they desire; and yet fancy that in doing so they have behind them the precedent of our attitude towards science.

I said that this (which my limits forbid me to discuss in full) was my deepest philosophical difference with Mr. James; but

there is a psychological difference involved in it which is the deepest of all. In his view, if I understand him, belief is always, because in essence, a matter of the will. In my conviction it is of an essence altogether distinct from will. Mr. James's opinion so pervades his mind as to color his literary style. He is so accustomed to class together desires and impulses, on the one hand, and an unformulated sense of likelihood or evidence, on the other, that I cannot yet be certain, after a somewhat earnest and sedulous study, whether his "Will to Believe" is not after all quite as much what Tennyson called a "heat of inward evidence,"—a heat, of course, liable to recurring chills. I mean, I suspect—and could instance passages in plenty—that the determination to have the "unseen world," etc., real is rather at times a vague but burning sense that they *must be* real, a dim internal perception of grounds past formulation that exhibit the denial of them as evidently false. In point of fact, of course, there is a broad difference between an informal inference and a desire. The vast majority of our inferences, all but a vanishing fraction, are informal, and many of these can by no pains be forced into the explicitness of formal conclusions. Nor are these latter therefore invalid. It would be virtually impossible to put into terms our ground for the conclusion on watching some "low" type of organism that it possessed consciousness. I suppose such an alleged effect on consciousness from without, as is known in the language of "Psychic Research" as a "mental impression," could not be pronounced impossible; the recipient's judgment that it was really not of subjective origin would, whether right or wrong, be a judgment (at a disadvantage through vagueness) from experience; as would also be his judgment that it was an illusion. The sense that in certain moral experiences we are in communication with a will and a spirit not our own; the unclear experience at various times of encompassing relations not of the acknowledged order; these may be as true as they may certainly be delusive; and if true, they would be "perceptions," informal inferences.

Now, Mr. James again and again fails to distinguish be-

tween such an obscure sense of evidence and a longing, or, as he delights to call it, a "demand." "It is almost incredible," he says, "that men who are themselves working philosophers should pretend that any philosophy can be, or ever has been, constructed without the help of personal *preference, belief, or divination.*" The italics are my own comment. "If I am born with such a superior general *reaction to evidence* that I can *guess* right and act accordingly . . . while my *less gifted* neighbor (paralyzed by his scruples and waiting for more evidence which he dares not anticipate, much as he longs to [a relapse to the notion of mere demand]) still stands shivering on the brink, by what law shall I be forbidden to reap the advantages of my superior *native sensitiveness?*" Of course the obvious objections to the will to believe do not apply to a superior native sensitiveness to evidence. The will to believe is defined as a resolution to have faith in excess of the evidence. If this means in excess only of the tangible or producible evidence, it seems an abuse of terms. But the truth, as I have said, is that the author declines to take cognizance of the distinction between feeling a thing to be true, or, in a less degree, to be likely, and accepting it as congenial. Cravings and divinings with him are one. In the chapter of his "Principles of Psychology" on "The Perception of Reality," he adopts at starting the dictum of J. S. Mill and Professor Brentano that mere presentation or imagination and judgment or belief are two irreducibly different and unanalyzable modes of consciousness. Further, belief is a variety of feeling and, he adds at the close, essentially the same mode of consciousness as will. I regret that I can quote his remarks only in part. "All that the mind does is in both cases the same; it looks at the object and consents to its existence, espouses it, says 'it shall be my reality.' [Behold in the sober definitions of psychology the self-assertive spirit of the Revolution!]. It turns to it, in short, in the interested, active, emotional way . . . *Will and Belief, in short, meaning a certain relation between objects and the self, are two names for one and the same psychological phenomenon.*" The emphasis is the author's own.

The dissident is usually rather tempted to describe the

views he rejects as "singular" than to explain them as natural; but, for my own part, I could wish for room to trace the tendencies which made it possible to maintain that in believing we are constantly upholding in existence the world of our belief and of ourselves enacting its reality. But I am confined to stating an opposite view. This does not regard mere mental presentation and belief as radically different, but the latter as a species of the former. James Mill's theory of belief as an indissoluble association of ideas is, indeed, inadequate. The association may be dissoluble, the image may be distorted or taken apart, but not without resistance. When Mr. Spencer implies that belief is a persistent association, he comes nearer to avoiding objection. Mr. James Ward, Mr. Stout, and Mr. H. R. Marshall have given kindred analyses. Dr. Alfred Hodder,¹ independently of the later writers, has transformed James Mill's formula into a "spontaneous association of ideas," and it is from his clear exposition that my view is adopted. When Professor Brentano examined and rejected in succession the opinions that the difference between presentation and judgment was a difference of intensity, a difference of content, a difference in the combination of subject and predicate, and thereupon concluded that it was a unique and undecomposable difference, he overlooked one possibility. It might be a difference in the behavior of the content. It might be what Hume had in mind when, besides the various terms of intensity that he employed, he characterized a belief as a more "firm" and "steady" idea. That conformation which the representative images take of themselves when we think of a subject, and keep of themselves while we think of it, not wholly preventing their being tampered with by voluntary effort of imagination, but offering some resistance to such effort; that stands to us for the conformation of the facts. In other words, the shape the images take of their own accord when we let them alone (where they take any stable shape, where we are not doubting or dreaming),—the attitude into which the mind instinctively falls,—that is the belief. That is, belief is our

¹ Philosophical Review, vol. v., p. 3.

habitual way of imagining the facts of any subject; it is a habit of imagination. Hence it may also be described as an involuntary conception. Where we have to put together or hold together the images in that special configuration, the result is no longer our belief, but the way we choose for the moment to imagine the thing.* The objective world appearing in perception is distinguished (among other marks) by being independent of our wills; while our eyes are open, there the object stands, will it away as much as we choose. So it is with the objective world appearing in belief and not immediately present to the senses; it is distinguished by being independent of our wills. We may close our eyes, or we may cease thinking of the subject; otherwise the thing independently maintains itself for consciousness. Much comfort has been taken by Professor Paulsen and Professor James, in their defence of the postulate, from what the former calls the "voluntaristic" view of intellect and the latter the "essentially teleological" view of the "conceiving or theorizing" faculty. This is the basis of the latter's essay on "Reflex Action and Theism." The intellect "functions exclusively for the sake of ends," for proper reactions upon the environment. Let me admit it at once. It follows from this, however, as we learn, that when we are taking to ourselves a philosophy we have only to consult directly for its effect upon action. The inference sadly mis-carries. If our reflective faculty subserves reaction upon the environment, how does it subserve it, and why should such an appliance be there? The answer is bound up with the theory of belief. The reflective faculty subserves reaction by carrying a copy or representative of the environment. If

* As we have seen, a belief may be produced by will. But it is not maintained by will. James Mill in effect compared a belief to a rod which no effort can break asunder. Let us compare it rather to a strap of india-rubber, which may be drawn apart, but which flies back when we let it go. But if we are fascinated by the effect of drawing it out, and repeat the operation often enough, the strap is likely to lose its elasticity and remain of itself elongated. The only feature that the analogy fails to illustrate is that the belief in its new form has a fresh elasticity of its own, as at first. Force of will, then, may produce a habit of imagination,—*i.e.*, a belief; but when the habit has become such, it dispenses with the support of will.

we tamper with that representative we tamper with our sole clue to action. If, as commonly, we are not in sensible presence of the particular portion of the environment with which we are concerned to deal, it is all-important that when we were in its presence it should so have left its impress upon us that now we retain some semblance of the original—a conceived, or, as Professor Simon Patten has called it, a subjective environment—to which to suit our conduct. Precisely because it is purely incidental to action must this subjective environment be kept intact,—uneffaced and unembellished by the mutinous active impulses that at times would meddle with it. This subjective environment is, of course, the world of our belief.

I hold then—as this broken summary and these scattered suggestions would indicate—that there is a sufficiently firm basis in the conditions of life for the stern fact-facing temper for which Mr. James has so sorry an opinion. I feel it to be a declension from the heroics of “deliberate and courageous” faith; but after all one need not be put to confusion because the masters of speculative romance can “use grander language” than oneself; nor need one be envious of the scenic sublimities enjoyed by gentlemen who regard philosophy as an opportunity to express their taste in universes. We are told, indeed, that the quality of our own natures is shown by the scale and imperiousness of our “demands” upon the world we inhabit; but I cannot think it necessary, in order to clear one’s character as a man, to commit a folly as a thinker. We are told, too, that all philosophic thought is an affair of one’s demands, and that in disagreeing with so many of our opponents’ opinions we make it evident that our own intellectual taste is essentially negative and destructive. There is an unspiritual energy of intellect whose love is for logic as a craft, and which animates a class of critical rigorists and precisians, extreme to mark what is done amiss in the minutiae of argument, but of a nature scarcely deep enough at root to feel the more far-reaching needs. To this I suppose there is little to be said. Not being of those who “enjoy a certain amount of uncertainty” in their religion, we cannot demonstrate by a

postulating faith our depth of spiritual nature. For the rest, it may perhaps be taken as a confirmation of the charge that we are unanxious to rebut it.

DICKINSON S. MILLER.

PHILADELPHIA.

THE IDEA OF PROGRESS.*

THERE is none of us, I suppose, who does not, in some way or other, hope that he is making progress, or that progress is being made with some plan or work in which he is interested. It is the common characteristic of human life to look forward. "Man," as it has been said, "partly is, but wholly hopes to be." And this common characteristic is one that has been specially emphasized in recent generations, more particularly in connection with what has come to be known as the doctrine of development or evolution. Thus it comes that there are few words that are more freely used in our time than "progress." We speak familiarly of the nineteenth century as having made more progress in the arts and sciences than any other century that went before, or perhaps (as Mr. A. R. Wallace has recently urged) than all other centuries put together. We speak of our political institutions as having made great progress since the time of the Revolution. We commonly think, also, that we have made some progress, if not quite so great, in manners, in literature, in the appreciation of nature, in sympathy for our fellow-men. And sometimes we tend to go farther, and to think of progress not merely as a characteristic of this "wonderful century," but as a law of the universe, as an aspect of the great cosmic process, showing itself in the development of animal species as well as in the growth of human institutions, extending downward also to the life of plants, and perhaps even to be seen in the structure of rocks and mountains and islands and continents, and in the formation of suns and worlds.

And certainly, whatever may be thought of the larger ques-

* A lecture delivered before the Bristol Ethical Society in October, 1898.